

ISLAY & JURA - wild and w

So many tempting treats await visitors to these glittering island gems that it's difficult to know where to begin. Rich in heritage, Islay and Jura offer game fishing, sea angling, bird-watching, deer-spotting, walking, climbing or just trailing your bare feet through soft sandy beaches.

You'll return home invigorated, refreshed and with a deep sense of ancient history that will stay with you for many years. And we've yet to mention the whisky... Not for nothing is Islay known as the Queen of the Hebrides. It's the most southern of the west coast islands known as the Inner Hebrides and its beauty draws visitors back year after year. Islay and Jura are the least discovered of the islands yet their place in Scottish history is important, with links with early Christianity and the Lord of the Isles.

Covering 600 square kilometres and with a population of 3,000, Islay is easy to reach. Transport links are good by



The village of Portnahaven, Isle of Islay

D & N MacKenzie
Car Hire on Islay

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Email: enquiry@carhireonIslay.co.uk
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The Garage opposite Islay Airport.
Quote: HOLIDAY WEST when phoning.

road, ferry and air. The island has its own airport at Glenegedale with flights to Glasgow. Ports Ellen and Askaig have regular ferry services from West Loch Tarbert on the Argyll mainland. A ferry also runs from Port Askaig to Feolin on Jura, with a new fast ferry from Jura to the mainland; sea Safari.

Islay is rich in wildlife and a mecca for birdwatchers as well as a huge draw for sea anglers and game fishermen/women.

The Oa RSPB reserve near Port Ellen has a rugged coastline and open moorland. They have guided walks on which you may be lucky enough to see a rare chough or golden eagle! The nearest self-catering, open all year, to the RSPB is Coillabus Cottage, The Oa. Visit www.islay-cottage.co.uk. Please contact: Mrs Hector Ross, 35 Madera Street, Edinburgh, EH6 4AJ. Tel: 0131 553 1911 now taking bookings for Autumn

The Port Charlotte Hotel has been completely restored to provide the discerning guest with high-class modern facilities in the original delightful Victorian surroundings.

Port Charlotte is an attractive conservation village built from whitewashed stone around 1830, on the west shore of Loch Indaal.

A large comfortable conservatory opens out into the garden, which in turn leads down to a sandy beach.

The residents' lounge and public bar feature open fires where guests can unwind with convivial company.

Most bedrooms enjoy lovely sea views and all are tastefully decorated, furnished with antiques and well equipped with the luxuries you would expect and more. The central theme of the restaurant is local

produce, freshly prepared to order and served in elegant surroundings.

The dinner menu is a la carte and changes regularly - you can expect beef and lamb from local farms to feature, or game from the nearby island estates.

Also frequently on the menu are scallops, lobsters and prawns, fresh from the Islay fishing fleet. Quality vegetarian meals are always available, as are a selection of fine wines from around the world.

The public bar serves excellent bar lunches and evening bar meals and has over 120 of the finest Islay malt whiskies in the world for you to sample.

The Port Charlotte Hotel is recommended in the Michelin and Good Food Guide and highly rated in The Best of Scotland Guide. The hotel is also a must for lovers of Scottish art and traditional music.

From the garden you can walk down to the sandy beach from where you can explore the myriad of rock pools or take a stroll around the bay to the lighthouse.

Man first settled on Islay 10,000 years ago. At its height, its population was 15,000 - difficult to imagine today - but the Highland clearances caused thousands of island folk to emigrate mainly to the Carolinas, Australia and Ontario. Hebridean islanders' roots are very strong and the descendants of those forced to emigrate to remain alive, return to Islay to trace their genealogy and learn about the history of the land of their forefathers.

Islay malt whisky is world famous, Ardbeg, Lagavullin, Laphroaig, distilled in



Bowmore Harbour, Isle of Islay

the south of the island, with their strong peaty flavour; Bruichladdich, Bowmore, Bunahabhainn and Caol Ila, are subtler in taste but no less palatable.

Islay's whisky industry is 200 years old. If you fancy a taste of these wonderful spirits a tour of any of these distilleries is not to be passed up - there's nothing like a 'wee dram' to warm the cockles of your heart.

Kilchoman Distillery, (pronounced Kilmohman) established in 2005, is a farm distillery and the first to be built on Islay for 124 years. Kilchoman gives everyone the opportunity to see all that is best in the grass-roots traditions of malt whisky distilling - from barley to bottle.

Kilchoman is the smallest distilleries on Islay with an annual production of 90 to 100,000 litres of alcohol per year.

Kilchoman is one of only six distilleries that carry out traditional floor maltings, but the key difference at Kilchoman is that the barley is grown on the farm at the distillery, whereas other distilleries purchase barley from around the country.

When mature Kilchoman single malt will be bottled at the distillery.

Bottling will take place during 2011 from selected fresh and refill bourbon casks at 46%vol without chill-filtration or added colour.

New Spirit, their one year old spirit, is in a typical Islay style with peating levels of 50ppm of phenols. The 'new spirit' has been well received by experts and enthusiasts world wide.

Islay is a 'twitcheers' paradise with birdwatchers whooping on the island to set up their binoculars to look for that elusive 'rara avis'. Principally the island is a haven for oystercatchers, cormorants,

SELF-CATERING

138 Frederick Crescent, Port Ellen.
Contact Mrs Shaw Tel: 01496 302335

62 Frederick Crescent, Port Ellen. Contact
Carol MacDonald Tel: 01496 302155

GUEST HOUSES

Askernish, Pier Road, Port Ellen.
Contact: Joy Prentice Tel: 01496 302536

69 Frederick Crescent, Port Ellen. Contact: Fiona Wright. Tel: 01496 302396 or 07799 483289

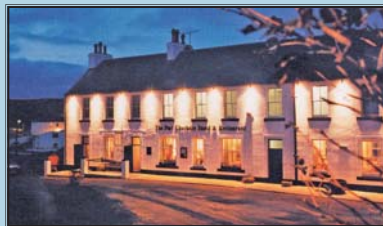
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Day trips do have their appeal. Value for time and money, one supposes. Three distilleries in one day - and on foot or perhaps cycling. "The Bothy Cycle Centre" in Port Ellen repairs, sells and hires bikes. You will find it at 91 Lennox Street - just off the main street. Tel: 01496 302391. With ample cycles and three distilleries within three miles many people use cycles to get to all three distilleries in one day. And indulge in some of the best food in Islay at the Old Kiln restaurant at Ardbeg.

An early start at Kennacraig (south of Tarbert, Kintyre) and the ferry arrives at Port Ellen at 9.20 in the morning! Beyond Ardbeg is a paradise for wild life watchers. Three species of deer and grey and common seals bask on the rocks and islets. In the heart of deer country is the Kildalton Cross carved 1200 years ago and in remarkable, if not perfect, undamaged condition.

The ferry departs Port Ellen at 1800 and returns you to Kennacraig. Cars may be left there for the day. But, to do justice for your time spent travelling, do consider a stopover. There is a dozen or more B&Bs, two hotels with a third one rebuilt and reopening in early 2009. Also some of the forty self catering units consider short stay lets. And all Islay has much more to offer the visitor whether it be whisky, wild life, walking or just enjoying the warm welcome. Check sailings with CalMac timetables for there are variations during the week and with the time of year.

It is good to note that the rainfall in the south of Islay is minimal for the Hebrides. The gulf stream ensures that Islay (Ile - the green isle) remains green throughout the winter. The golf course is playable almost all the time. THEN there's Islay Mist, but one can drink that!

Port Ellen leaflets provide all the information you need - pick one up at ferry terminals and in shops. There is a Jazz Festival in September and a book festival in Port Ellen in July.

To hear the red deer stags roaring during the rut come in September or early October. To see and hear the multitude of geese that winter here come between October and March. To see the choughs come any time. To hear the corncrake calling the best time is late May.

